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Conference Abstract

Facing the Future Together: Anchoring informatics progress in community at NMNH

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Abstract

A 2020 external review of science at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History (NMNH) noted that increased investment in informatics was a key element for becoming a modern knowledge institution. This review charged NMNH with developing and implementing a comprehensive strategy for the future of the museum's informatics program including reorganization, innovation, and new approaches to staffing to address urgent needs in data science and informatics capacity. After completing assessments of current capacity and needs and the role of NMNH informatics within the global biodiversity informatics landscape, the informatics task force found that robust community building, both internally and externally, would be critical to an expanded vision of informatics at NMNH.

Approaches for local and global community strategies across an organization, like NMNH and its people, go hand in hand. Solidifying a strong foundation locally is often necessary for enabling robust, coordinated participation and resource sharing at the global level. Although the task force's primary focus has been internal community building to support the increasing need for local informatics capacity, much of that internal work is closely aligned with and often driven by external participation and networks. It is also clear that many organizations are contending with similar challenges, highlighting the importance of sharing strategies and lessons learned through peer-to-peer discussions and knowledge sharing.

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Based on the results of the task force's surveys, interviews and research, the new NMNH model will be anchored on the development of a community of practice. This model extends knowledge and strengthens communication and coordination with departments, programs, and collaborators both within the Smithsonian and globally. It focuses on expanding capacity through improved knowledge sharing, cross training and more strategic application of resources and tasking, hopefully resulting in a robust, innovative environment.

Here we open discussions on the importance of community for increasing capacity in support of the expanding natural history informatics landscape and strategies for the future at many levels. We highlight findings from efforts of the NMNH task force to explore what successful, supported informatics capacity looks like and initial proposed plans for revitalizing the NMNH informatics program.

Keywords

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